No. 7
1500/26

THOUGHTS

ON THE

PRESENT POSTURE

OF

AFFAIRS;

IN A

LETTER to a FRIEND.

LONDON:
Printed for E. JEFFERY, Pall-Mall, 1794.
(Price One Shilling.)

30
60
JUN

THOUGHTS, &c.

My Dear Sir,

In compliance with your requeſt, I ſit down to give you my ſentiments a little more at large on the preſent ſituation of affairs, which ſo naturally occupies the thoughts of every man, at a moment when not only this country, but all Europe is convulſed, and threatened by events new and unparalleled in the hiſtory of the world. I ſhall endeavour to do this as concisely as

I can; and if I ſhall be able to adminiſter one gleam of comfort, or diminiſh in any degree the alarm which ſeems to have taken ſo ſtrong poſſeſſion, not only of your mind, but of the minds of moſt men, I ſhall think my trouble repaid in the moſt flattering and ſatisfactory manner.

Waving all reflections on what is paſt, and the manner in which we got into this ſituation, whether we were forced into the war by neceſſity, or were encouraged to it by a reaſonable expectation of ſucceſs; the only queſtions of real importance which appear now to deſerve conſideration, are, whether there is a practicability of a continuance in it, and the dangers attending it; or whether there is a poſſibility of making peace, and the inconveniences and hazard to be apprehended from ſuch a meaſure.

After the diſaſtrous events of this campaign, which have ſurpaſſed even the

the doubts and apprehenſions of the moſt deſponding; when we have not only been driven from all our former conqueſts, but have ſcarcely been able to make any reſiſtance to the repeated attacks of the enemy; and this not from any particular misfortune or unforeſeen calamity, but merely from the ſuperior ſtrength and activity of thoſe whom we are fighting againſt; I preſume no grounds of hope, or proſpect of future ſucceſs, can be held out, that do not ariſe from an increaſed force on the part of the allies; a better application of that force, or a diminution of that ſtrength on the part of the enemy. Now is it reaſonable to ſuppoſe, that we have not exerted ourſelves in every poſſible manner during this campaign, knowing ſo well what force we had to combat, and the neceſſity of ſpeedy ſucceſs? or that we had not, after the experience of the former year, and the time given to digeſt and conſult on the beſt plan of operations during the whole winter, aided by all

our allies who were hearty in the cauſe, directed our arms to the beſt point? It muſt be admitted that we raiſed as many men, as much money, and entered into as many ſubſidiary treaties as we are able to do, or there is no excuſe for not having done it: neither parliament nor people ſhewed any unwillingneſs to comply with any requiſition that was made on the part of government. With regard to the command of the army, againſt which ſuch a cry has been raiſed, I don't think much ſtreſs ought to be laid upon it in this argument. I know nothing of the merit of the perſon who was at the head of the Britiſh army, as a general; he may perhaps not have the judgment which is acquired by experience, or the genius of a great military commander; nobody, I believe, doubts of his courage, and good diſpoſition for the cauſe in which he is engaged; and I have not heard of any enterprize having been neglected or failed thro' his want of conduct; ſuch inſtances we ſhould certainly have

have heard enough of, had they exiſted, and been of any conſequence; and when it is conſidered that it is of the command of the Britiſh army alone that we are ſpeaking, I believe very few perſons will be found who are in a ſtate to form a proper judgment, who really think that the reſult of the campaign would have been different under any commander whatſoever.

A much more reaſonable ſuppoſition ſeems to be, that we ſhall not be able to make equal exertions in another year. The conſumption of men in a long and ſevere campaign is not eaſily replaced. Money will not do every thing. We have already ſeen of what uſe a ſubſidiary treaty with one power has been: it is ſuppoſed that our propoſals have been rejected by another: at any rate it is not probable that more troops would have been brought into the field by it, and we ſhould only have had the honor of paying them. I know of no other power

to

to reſort to; and the jealouſies and want of harmony amongſt thoſe already engaged, which ſeems to be increaſing every day, partly from different views, and partly from different opinions; from the deſpondency of ſome, and the want of energy in others, which are not unlikely to end in the total ſeparation of many, render it more than probable that we ſhall never enter upon another campaign, with the ſame advantages as we did either of the laſt.

If we are to look for ſucceſs from a diminution of the force of the enemy, let us enquire from whence this diminution is likely to ariſe. Is it from their having got in their fleets full of ſtores and proviſions of every kind from America? Is it from the great and invariable ſucceſs that has attended all their undertakings during this campaign? Is it from the prodigious maſs of property of all ſorts, proviſions, ſpecie, ſtores, and every uſeful article, the plunder of Flanders

and

and Brabant, which they have tranſmitted into France? Or is it laſtly from the great moderation and unanimity which ſeems to prevail in France compared with any former year, ſince the fall of ROBESPIERRE, and not only an apparent change of ſyſtem, but a real and ſubſtantial alteration in all their acts and reſolutions, by ſubſtituting mildneſs inſtead of terror for the order of the day; by reſpecting both in profeſſion and practice, as far as they have yet gone, the rights of humanity and juſtice; and combining as much as is poſſible perhaps, in their preſent critical poſition, meaſures of mercy and indulgence with thoſe of vigilance and exertion?

Having thus conſidered the foundadation of our hopes from our own increaſed ſtrength, or the weakneſs of the enemy; let us now conſider the dangers and diſadvantages of continuing the war. Every war that does not offer a fair proſpect of ſucceſs, is unjuſtifiable on account

count of the horrors and bloodſhed neceſſarily attending it; impolitic to the ſtate from the loſs of men who make the riches of it; and oppreſſive to the people from the money that muſt be raiſed to defray the expences of it. But in this war, and to this country, there are additional dangers to which we have never yet found ourſelves expoſed. It is imagined, and I fear with too much reaſon, that there are amongſt us numerous bodies of people, excited by the doctrines of the Rights of Man, whoſe real aim is the deſtruction of this government, and who are labouring, as far as they can with ſafety to themſelves, to make proſelytes to their cauſe, and are ready to ſeize the firſt opportunity to put in execution their horrid purpoſe. The late acquittal of Mr. HARDY, though it may have done honor to this country, by ſhewing that ſtrict and impartial juſtice will outweigh every conſideration whatever, has not, I believe, convinced many of the purity of his intentions, or

tended

tended to diſcourage the ſocieties from the purſuit of their favorite object. Amongſt the various projects of the French, an invaſion of this country has been often talked of, and the ſucceſs they have had in almoſt all their undertakings, however raſh and deſperate, may perhaps induce them to make the attempt. In all former wars, when ſuch a project was in contemplation, it was looked upon merely as an operation of war, and for the purpoſe of the moment; they had no other hopes of ſucceſs but from the force of their own arms, and no other view but a temporary diſtreſs and confuſion. On our ſides it was regarded as an undertaking, though not to be deſpiſed, yet not very formidable, and government felt confident in the united ſtrength and energy of the country to repel ſuch an attempt. Under our preſent circumſtances, the caſe is very different. It is more than probable, that as ſoon as a landing was known to be effected, (and our naval

officers can beſt tell how far they think the extent of our coaſt can be defended by our fleet) thoſe who wiſh well to the cauſe would be alert and ready to ſeize the opportunity. We ſhould hear of inſurrections at Sheffield, at Leeds, at Birmingham, at Norwich, and perhaps in London, whilſt the little interior force which remains in this country would be required to march to the coaſt to repel the invaders. If we are obliged to divide our force to anſwer all theſe demands, it would probably leſſen the chance of ſucceſs in any one point; and if any was neglected, we know from what we have lately ſeen in Franee, what rapid progreſs inſurrection makes when unoppoſed, or upon a firſt ſucceſs; what formidable power every day and even every hour may give it; what influence the inſtruments of terror and blood have upon a frightened and unarmed people; and God knows how far the humane and generous character of Engliſhmen may be ſo perverted and

corrupt-

corrupted by the wickedneſs of their leaders, as to make them adopt in a moment of frenzy the horrid example of their ſanguinary neighbours. If any man can point out to me a ſituation in any ſtate of things whatever, whether of war or peace, which approaches to this in danger, or in probability, he will ſhew what my imagination is too weak to form for itſelf.

Having examined our proſpect of ſucceſs in a continuance of the war, and the inconveniences it may expoſe us to; let us now enquire whether it would be poſſible to make peace, and whether the danger would be ſuch as to deter us from it. All war is a calamity which has ever been looked upon as a temporary evil, which muſt lead in the end to peace, the natural ſtate of nations and mankind. Whether the French forced us into the war, or the contrary, is a matter ſcarcely worth diſcuſſion now, and has little to do with the preſent con-

ſideration. There is no doubt that ſome of the other powers were the aggreſſors, and the French have always conſidered themſelves as unjuſtly attacked, for the purpoſe of deſtroying their new conſtitution; and of reſtoring the old government in its former ſtate. They have defended themſelves vigorouſly, and with ſucceſs, and have repulſed the united efforts of almoſt all Europe. It is not unreaſonable then to ſuppoſe that having obtained the end for which they were fighting, they ſhould have no further wiſh to prolong the war. If we are to believe the accounts we have received from that country, all France pants for peace, and it is natural enough that this ſhould be the caſe; that men who have for ſo long a time ſacrificed every thing to one favorite object, the Republic, their preſent liberty, their property, the eaſe and comfort of their lives, ſhould be anxious, after having obtained that object, to be reſtored to the enjoyment of what they have been

ſo

ſo long deprived of, and the ſpeculative advantages of what has been thought worthy of ſuch great ſacrifices. If it ſhould be ſaid, that though this may be the caſe with the nation at large, their leaders would not agree to a peace, as it would tend to deprive them of their power and authority; I anſwer, that it is by no means clear, that this would be the conſequence, and that war in general has been found to be a more difficult and dangerous ſtate for miniſters than peace; and though perhaps this might have been ſuppoſed with more apparent probability during the reign of ROBESPIERRE and his aſſociates, yet I cannot ſee why it ſhould be ſo difficult to conceive, that amongſt the leading men in France, there ſhould be found ſome, if not many, who fairly and honeſtly wiſh for the eſtabliſhment of a government which they have riſked their lives to ſupport, and waded through ſuch ſcenes of blood and horror to preſerve.

Some

Some are apt to believe that they would be afraid to diſband their numerous armies. This would prove too much, as it would prove the intention of eternal war. If it were thought dangerous or inconvenient to keep them embodied, from the particular circumſtances attending the formation of thoſe armies, it would be more ſafe and practicable to diſband them than in moſt caſes, as the greater part conſiſts in requiſition men, who have been taken from their homes and their profeſſions, and would be too happy to be reſtored to them; and as ſoon as peace was eſtabliſhed, would be at no difficulty to find employment in their different callings. But after all, this matter can never be ſettled by diſcuſſion, and can be aſcertained only by the experiment, which miniſters can never find a difficulty in making, when they are ſo inclined, and I know no miſchief that can attend the enquiry.

I come now to the laſt point, and which

which I believe weighs more in moſt people's minds than any other,—the dangers of a peace, in caſe it ſhould be found practicable and expedient. Theſe, I preſume, can only ariſe from two cauſes. The fear of the French attacking us openly, when we are off our guard, and ill prepared to reſiſt them; or of their ſending emiſſaries to ſpread their doctrines ſecretly, and excite the people of this country to follow their example. With regard to the firſt, to the ſhame of all civilized nations it muſt be owned, that treaties have too often been no longer obſerved than has ſuited the convenience of the parties. The queſtion therefore is, whether there is more ground of apprehenſion from France than from the King of Pruſſia, or the Empreſs of Ruſſia, or any other power. And I confeſs I do not ſee on what ſuch a ſuppoſition is founded. Nor do I ſee in what reſpect it would be her intereſt to do ſo. After the length and havock of the preſent war; after the very great difficulties

ficulties ſhe has had to ſtruggle with, the great exertions ſhe has made, and the exhauſted ſtate in which ſhe is left; with a new government to model, and great loſſes of every kind to repair; I cannot ſee why it ſhould be more the intereſt of France to plunge into a new war, than it would have been for America, or any other ſtate under ſimilar circumſtances. But even ſhould it appear ſo to their new governors, how very different would the undertaking of ſuch a war be from the preſent. They could no longer expect to poſſeſs the command of the nation, and all its reſources, as they do now, or rouſe the people to ſuch a degree of eagerneſs and ferment. It is to the enthuſiaſm alone which has animated all ranks of people in France, that their ſucceſs can be attributed; it is this that has ſupported them through every privation and hardſhip, and carried them through the moſt deſperate enterprizes; it is this that has given to their rulers all the ſtrength of the country

beyond

beyond any example that was ever known, by putting the whole property of it in requiſition, and inveſting them with the abſolute and uncontrouled diſpoſal of men, money, proviſions, and every article that could poſſibly be of uſe.—This enthuſiaſm, though difficult to quell, is not very eaſy to excite. We know but of two cauſes in the hiſtory of man that have ever inſpired it to any degree amongſt a whole nation,—liberty, and religion. The firſt of theſe, whether well or ill conceived is no matter, has operated on the French during this war; and it cannot be ſuppoſed that in the midſt of profound peace, and without any provocation, it ſhould be in the power of any ſet of men to perſuade a whole nation that her liberty is at ſtake, and that they muſt leave their country to defend it againſt no attack, and no apparent enemy: and as to any other cauſe of war, either of policy or aggrandizement, it will always admit of ſo many doubts and differences of opinion, par-

ticularly in ſuch a government as is likely to exiſt in France, that their rulers will not be inclined to venture raſhly on ſuch a ſtep; they will probably conſider well the uncertainty of the undertaking; that they have no longer the effects of the clergy or the lands of the emigrants to defray the expences; that the burden muſt fall immediately upon the people; and that upon the whole, it is likely to be attended with more danger to themſelves and the conſtitution, and more miſchief to the nation, than any real advantage to either.

With regard to their emiſſaries, and the ſpreading of their principles in this country. It cannot be ſuppoſed that it is a French face, or a French language, that can have the leaſt effect, eſpecially amongſt that claſs of people upon whom it is ſuppoſed they will endeavour to operate. Their principles are already perfectly known, and will be beſt judged of by a compariſon of the happineſs and advantages they will be found to enjoy

under

under their new government, with thoſe we have ſo long experienced under our own; and if they needed any elucidation, the ſocieties already eſtabliſhed in this country, and the active and zealous promoters of them would be able to do it with tenfold effect. Beſides that theſe emiſſaries would be equally liable to be watched, informed againſt, and puniſhed for any offence during their reſidence in this country, as any ſubject of Great Britain.

But our beſt ſecurity is, that in caſe of any tumult or inſurrection, we ſhould have our whole force at liberty, and in readineſs to quell it; and however numerous theſe diſaffected bodies may be ſuppoſed to be, I have never yet heard it imagined that they bear any proportion to the friends of our preſent government and conſtitution; and I truſt we ſhould find little difficulty in getting the better of them, when taken at the very beginning, and when the whole ſtrength of the country, no longer

cramped

cramped in its exertions, or divided by the preſſing call of a foreign enemy, was entirely free and applicable to that ſingle object. Admitting however, that there was not a perfect ſecurity, and that there were ſome reaſonable cauſes of apprehenſion, I ſtill maintain that it is by no means to be compared with the other; the one is poſitive and threatening every day whilſt the war exiſts; the other is ſpeculative and diſtant, and in no degree equal, were it to happen, to what we have to fear in our preſent ſtate of weakneſs, when we have ſcarcely one old regiment left in the kingdom, from the united efforts and enthuſiaſtic ardor of all France.

Such are the reaſons for my confidence in peace, and dread of war. I have endavoured to ſtate them fairly as they preſented themſelves, and truſt I have not ſhewn, what I have certainly not felt on this occaſion, the ſmalleſt bias or prejudice in favor of any party whatſoever. This is no time for ſuch con-

conſiderations, when our very exiſtence is at ſtake. It is matter of too little conſequence to a man, who wiſhes only the ſalvation of his country, by whom it is ſaved, provided it be but ſaved. *Amicus carus, carior Patria.* Let us ſecure a country to govern before we diſpute on the fitteſt men to govern it. It is a criſis when all ſpirit of party ſhould give way, and every motive of intereſt ſink in the general danger; and the only anxiety and exertions worthy of an Engliſhman at this moment, are to avert thoſe evils which are the moſt to be dreaded, and impoſſible to be repaired.

Believe me ever,

London, Nov. 15, 1794.

my dear Sir,

&c. &c. &c.

In the Preſs and will be publiſhed January 1795.

COLLECTIONS for the HISTORY of HAMPSHIRE, in 5 vol. 4to. Illuſtrated with upwards of Sixty Views, Portraits, &c.

Any Gentleman of the County chooſing to contribute Plates illuſtrating this Work, may have proper ſize Paper to work them on, by applying to Mr. CLARKE, Printer, *Northumberlaud Court*, in the *Strand*.

N. B. Only 250 Copies of the above Work are printed.